Summary of Public Feedback on the draft Early Learning Plan

A committed group of more than 120 stakeholders have been working on creating a draft Washington State Early Learning Plan. This process included a public comment period from October 26 to November 11, 2009. The lead entities for this effort (Department of Early Learning, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction and Thrive by Five Washington) received feedback from various types of stakeholders such as: social workers, psychologists, parents, Head Start/ECEAP providers, school board members, educators, family service coordinators, health care providers, higher education representative and business owners.

Input came from around the state through a variety of mechanisms including: work group efforts, community meetings, key communicator surveys, direct e-mails, and the outcomes/strategies survey. Overall, we heard from 750-1,000 people who care about early learning in Washington State.[1]

Following is a high-level summary of key themes captured in the feedback. *Note: All of the feedback was reviewed and considered by those writing the plan. This is not a statistical analysis—simply a summary to offer a sense of the feedback received.*

K-3
• Schools need to be ready for all kids
• Need to be more specific about strategies to eliminate the achievement gap in K-3
• Transitions are critical—how will previous experiences be documented? how will we ensure that the information moves with the child?
• Better involvement of the K-3 principals and administrators
• Need for stronger K-3 involvement in the ELP♦
• Kindergarten assessment—how will this roll out?
• Benchmarks—what's happening?
• Communication and common language needed for alignment
• It needs to be P-3 and we can build off existing systems
• Need stronger language around after-school care ♦

Licensing
• Regulations ♦
• Continue to build a QRIS system ♦
• Stronger incorporation of school-age care in QRIS
• Need for dispute resolution
• Concerns regarding cost effectiveness of QRIS

Professional Development
• It is critical ♦

♦ Indicates that comment was received multiple times

- Staff salaries and benefits ♦
- Better coordination and articulation of professional development trainings
- After-school providers need support
- Career and Wage Ladder— vital to centers in the program ♦
- Support QRIS
- QRIS – incentives to promote quality improvements; tiered reimbursement
- Finding qualified staff is challenging
- Diversity of children served reflected in providers serving them (special needs, cultural diversity, etc.)
- Education levels equal higher pay
- Need to make stronger connections with higher education and meet providers where they are ♦

Subsidies

- Full rate reimbursement to providers ♦
- Leverage private dollars to increase the subsidy rate
- Parent education tied to subsidy

Parent Supports

- College parent education programs exist and could be expanded ♦
- Build on existing programs
- Paid Family Leave
- Play and Learn groups
- Community Cafés and other models for parent engagement ♦
- Parent drop-in programs
- Parent/community linkage and connections to supports at all levels
- Acknowledge the importance of connections made between schools and families through after-school care
- Language needs to be broader to include supports for fathers ♦
- Parents need basic education/training in basic child development before they can be an engaged partners (requested in DEL parent survey) ♦
- Feels like government control over parenting ♦
- Supports for teens ♦

Funding

- We need to fund this plan ♦
- Needs to be affordable for all families
- Paid Family Leave
- Tiered reimbursement for high quality
- Funding support from K-12 since they reap all the benefits/savings from a comprehensive EL system (P-3 schools)
- Supports are needed for middle-income families; middle class getting squeezed by child care costs ♦
- Without funding, outcomes and strategies are meaningless

- Need to fund quality (QRIS) ♦
- Fund developmental screening ♦

Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)/Full-Day Kindergarten (FDK)

- It needs to be a constitutional right
- Need to speed up FDK implementation
- What will happen to providers if UPK is implemented? ♦
- We need to do both UPK and FDK ♦
- Make sure UPK includes both 3- and 4-year-olds ♦
- Who will implement UPK?
- How will a mixed-delivery system work? ♦
- Is FDK really worth the investment for ALL kids?
- We should not push kids into formal schooling, fear of losing childhood to academic push—stay away from institutionalization of children
- Too much focus on academics instead of whole-child development
- Expand eligibility of ECEAP
- Negative impact on private providers ♦
- Spend money on at-risk programs like ECEAP rather than FDK for all kids

Implementation/Infrastructure

- Pilots make system-building difficult
- More details needed on how implementation of the plan will happen ♦
- How will local private and public partners implement?
- How will we measure progress? ♦
- How will we hold people accountable?
- Build coordinating mechanism between lead and partner agencies and local coalitions
- Data system is necessary
- Only implement what can be sustained
- Liked the shared governance concept between state and local
- Need to address lack of facilities ♦
- Zoning and city ordinance issues

Diversity

- Ensure plan is multi-cultural ♦
- Children with disabilities—early interventions, diagnostics testing earlier ♦
- English Language Learners—multiple languages among providers other than English ♦
- Ensure we reach rural communities
- Disparities/disproportionality
- Cultural competency not strong enough in the outcomes and strategies
- Defining success is not the same for all kids and culture ♦
- Diversity of children served reflected in providers serving them (special needs, cultural diversity, etc)

- Guiding principles need to include Latino, African-American and Native children/families
- Translation is difficult for families trying to find/access services
- How does the plan address immigrants? ♦

Preparation Gap/Achievement Gap

- Need to be more specific about how we address the achievement gap and diversity ♦
- Guiding principle around all/some/few needs clarification ♦
- Need to call out Latino, African-American and Native children if we are ever going to eliminate the achievement gap
- Need specific strategies to deal with preparation/achievement gap
- How does it address migrant communities?

Comprehensive Services and System

- Infants/toddlers care ♦
- Need a bigger focus on health and safety ♦
- Reach Out and Read should be specified ♦
- Full range of services to serve at-risk children
- Coordination of services despite funding source (e.g. military, Head Start, standards and monitoring, etc.) ♦
- Language needs to be broader to include supports for fathers
- Services/systems should be based on brain research
- Include Strengthening Families as a guiding principle
- Developmental screening should be the norm, not the exception
- Concern regarding lack of curriculum-specific content in plan (i.e. numeracy)
- Focus on all components (oral health, social/emotional, etc.) ♦
- Focus on health and safety
- Strengthen nutrition and physical activity ♦
- Support family, friend and neighbor caregivers ♦
- Fear of losing "learning through play" ♦
- Need to include numeracy ♦

Transitions

- Focus on critical times such as transitions ♦
- Options and support for 5-year-olds and families who aren't "ready" for kindergarten
- Kindergarten assessment—need to clarify purpose
- Summer programs to protect gains
- Transitions needs to be its own outcome
- Schools need to be more welcoming to children and families

Glossary

- Need to define high quality ♦
- Success means different things in different cultures
- Terms to describe parents/families as partners
- Need to define all/some/few
- Need to define preparation gap vs. achievement gap
- Domains are at different levels—need to explain why that the unevenness is deliberate and reflects what already exists ♦
- Define evidence-based and research
- Define world-class
- Define culturally responsive
- Define longitudinal data system
- Define mixed delivery in terms of implementation
- Parents—label as parents and guardians
- Define competencies under professional development

PARKING LOT
- Public awareness ♦
- Library involvement ♦
- Governance—how will it be mandated?
- Need to reach out to economic associations, major businesses throughout the state. We need a larger foundation of support to make this happen and be sustainable
- More child-specific outcomes vs. system-level outcomes